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For More Information Contact

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Patricia Dewey, Manager, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program

(804) 864-7713

Charles Ford, PIO (804) 864-7668

**NEW VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROGRAM
LOANS HEARING AIDS TO CHILDREN**

(RICHMOND, Va.) – Children in Virginia who are facing delays in getting permanent hearing aids no longer have to wait. They can now borrow them from the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Hearing Aid Loan Bank.

The loan bank, which started in May, lends hearing aids and FM hearing enhancement systems for up to six months. That initial loan period can be extended for an additional six months in certain circumstances. The program is open to children under age 3 whose hearing loss is confirmed by an audiologist. To qualify, families must be in the process of securing permanent hearing aids through insurance or other means.

The program's goal is to provide children with temporary hearing aids so they do not experience developmental difficulties while their families work to secure permanent hearing aids for the child.

Parents can apply for hearing aids and FM systems by contacting their child's audiologist and completing an application form. The forms can be processed and hearing units can be mailed to the audiologist within a week. The Hearing Aid Loan Bank currently has 54 hearing aids and 35 FM systems to loan to eligible children.

"When children with hearing loss receive therapy or hearing aids before the age of 6 months, we can expect their language and cognitive skills to develop on par with their peers," said Patricia Dewey, manager of VDH's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program. "Otherwise they often experience difficulties in communication and emotional development."

The financial burden of securing hearing aids can be significant, and the process of securing means to fund the appliances can be time consuming. Costs range from \$700 to \$3,600 each. Often families have to buy two hearing aids, and most likely they need to purchase hearing aids more than once before the child reaches age 5.

Many insurance companies do not cover the cost of hearing aids and state and private funding sources have strict income requirements. These organizations are often last-resort funding sources that require families to first exhaust all other options for payment.

(more)

Hearing loss is one of the most common birth defects in the United States, affecting between one and three of every 1,000 newborns. VDH estimates that as many as 300 Virginia children are born every year with hearing loss. Virginia law requires all newborns be screened for hearing loss prior to discharge from the hospital. Those who do not pass the test are referred to an audiologist for follow-up testing. The hospitals and audiologists send results of their tests to VDH, which works with parents and professionals to promote the importance of early detection and access to early intervention services.

“Virginia has a very good system of screening newborns for hearing loss,” Dewey said. “Ninety-seven percent of the infants born in Virginia are screened before they leave the hospital. Because of this and follow up tests with audiologists, we detect hearing loss in children within three or four months after birth. With the help of our Hearing Aid Loan Bank, we are working to lower the age at which these children receive appropriate intervention services, including hearing aids.”

For more information about this program, call Lisa Powley at the Blue Ridge Care Connection for Children at (434) 924-0222.

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